The Roman Church Before Constantine

BY THE RIGHT REV.
MGR. LOUIS DUCHESNE

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24–26 East 21st Street
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The Crow Press
New York

Nihil Obstat:

REMIGIUS LAFORT, S.T.L.,

Censor, New York.

Imprimatur:

✠ JOHN M. FARLEY,

Archbishop of New York.

NEW YORK, May 3, 1909.

The following article was taken, with permission, from the work of Mgr. Louis Duchesne, entitled *Autonomies Ecclésiastiques: Églises Séparées*, Paris, 1896. New edition, 1904.

Mgr. Duchesne is well known as the author of a monumental edition of the *Liber Pontificalis*, he is actually the Director of the French School of History and Archeology at Rome, and President of the Historico-Liturgical Commission appointed to revise the Roman Breviary.

The translation is from the pen of Rev. Joseph W. Reilly, St. Joseph's Seminary (1904), Dunwoodie, New York, a young priest of great promise too early snatched away by death from the affection of his friends.

TO HIS DEAR MEMORY

IS THIS BOOKLET

LOVINGLY DEDICATED

J. B.

THE ROMAN CHURCH BEFORE CONSTANTINE

In these pages I shall attempt to set forth, in a very summary way, the relations of the Roman Church with the other churches from its origin to the reign of Constantine (312–337), laying more especial stress on the Greek-speaking Christian communities.

I

St. Irenæus wrote his great work against heresies shortly after the reign of Marcus Aurelius (†180). Alleging the tradition of the great churches against the Gnostics, he begins by quoting the teaching of the Church of Smyrna, which through St. Polycarp went back to the Apostle John; then he continues:

"But since it would be too long to enu-

merate here the succession of bishops in all the churches, it is sufficient for me to indicate the Apostolic tradition, the faith that has come down to us through the succession of bishops in the Church of Rome, great and ancient among all the churches,[1] universally known, founded at Rome by the two glorious Apostles Paul and Peter. This tradition suffices to confound all those who in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, or by vain glory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, are outside the truth. In truth, such is the superior preeminence of this Church that, of necessity, every Church—I mean the whole body of the faithful in every country,—agrees with her; every Church in which, whatever be the country, has been preserved uninterruptedly the Apostolic tradition." [2]

It is hard to find a more concise expression (1) of the doctrinal unity in the universal Church; (2) of the sovereign and unique importance of the Roman Church as witness, guardian, and organ of the

[1] *Maximæ et antiquissimæ.*
[2] Irenæus *Adversus Haereses*, III, 3.

Apostolic tradition; (3) of its superior preeminence in the group of Christian communities.

Moreover, a mere glance at the state of the Church toward the end of the second century suffices to show how correct is the impression transmitted to us by the holy bishop of Lyons. Where are, at this time, the great central cities which later held so important a place in the religious hierarchy? Jerusalem contains only a very small band of Greek Christians, colonists that have come from the Greek cities of Palestine, with no link binding them to the primitive community in which the Apostles lived. Of Byzantium it is needless to speak; everything leads us to think that it had still no bishop. Alexandria had one, and its list of bishops goes back to the Apostolic age; but in the time of St. Irenæus, Alexandria was hardly known except for its fruitfulness in Gnostic heresies. Thanks to the souvenirs of the New Testament and its very ancient bishop, the famous martyr Ignatius, Antioch enjoyed somewhat greater prominence. Of the successors of St. Ignatius one would be puzzled to find

anything to say. If Theophilus of Antioch had already written his apologetic works; if the "Pædagogus" and other writings of Clement were already in circulation among the educated Alexandrians, the ink was scarcely dry upon them. This literature, in fact, has nothing which marks it as the expression of the Church's tradition; any Christian whatever might have written it in any place. We must wait for Bishops Demetrius of Alexandria and Serapion of Antioch, that is until the time of the Severi, before we see these two cities appear as great centers of ecclesiastical thought.

From the point of view of tradition, there was, in fine, only one situation comparable to the position of Rome; it was that of Asia properly so called, the land which preserved the splendid souvenirs of St. John, St. Philip, Polycarp, Papias, of Thraseas, of Melito, and of so many other noted Christians. In citing the tradition of these churches by the side of Rome's, St. Irenæus showed a very correct insight into the ecclesiastical relations then existing. Now Rome, at this very time, enjoyed an especial pre-

eminence over the famous Christian communities of Asia, and this is attested by the following facts:

II

1. St. Paul's letter to the Romans extols the celebrity of this Christian community still in its infancy; "Your faith," he writes, "is spoken of throughout the whole world." [1] Even without this significant compliment the fact that St. Paul addressed this letter to the Church of Rome shows the exceptional importance of this community. The Epistle to the Romans is (in fact) a great doctrinal manifesto. It resumes the long debates maintained by the Apostle against the Judaizers and defines his views upon the universality of the Gospel. It is hard to imagine that he was moved to draw up this summary because of any special preoccupation with the conditions prevalent in the Roman Church; he as yet knew it only by hearsay; it seems that the preaching of Christianity at Rome had as yet met with no opposition from the Judaizers, as was the case with St.

[1] Rom., I, 8.

Paul's missions at Antioch, in Galatia, and at Corinth. Why did he deem it a duty to explain his teachings to the Roman Church? Doubtless, because from the very moment of its foundation he recognized its very great importance.

2. Later Paul came to Rome; St. Peter also sojourned there at a date, and during a period, which it is hard to determine; both were martyred and buried there. In this way the metropolis of the Roman world was definitely consecrated as the center of Christian unity. Again, the Jewish soul in its dreams and prophecies had long been contrasting the great Babylon of the West with the holy city of Jerusalem. Now, at the moment of Peter and Paul's death, Jerusalem saw the departure of the old disciples of Christ and the approach of the imperial armies which were to end its political destinies.

Antioch, the second Christian metropolis in the order of time, might have succeeded Jerusalem; but it was too distant from the center with relation to the rest of the empire; its sphere of influence was too limited. Rome was the city chosen.

Rome was, no doubt, the capital of the Empire; and this explanation has often been given for the preeminence of the Roman Church. Let us consider this objection. In the first place, ecclesiastical tradition, unanimous in seeing in the bishops of Rome the successors of the Apostle Peter, and recognizing in this title striking prerogatives, never presented them as resulting from the fact that these bishops had their see in the capital, but as due solely to the fact that they were the successors and vicars of St. Peter. If there were exceptions to this way of viewing things, they were found only in the Byzantine world, and this for the purpose of defending the comparison, introduced since the time of Theodosius, between the pontiffs of the new Rome and those of ancient Rome.[1]

[1] I have remarked with regret that the encyclical of the patriarch of Constantinople, issued in reply to Leo XIII's encyclical *Praeclara* seems to put the sojourn of St. Peter at Rome in the class of doubtful facts, and tries to explain the universal tradition upon this point of fact by the "pseudo-Clementines." This system, which is contrary to the belief hitherto held in the Greek, as well as the Latin Church, owes its origin to the investigations of F. Christian Baur and the rationalistic school of Tübingen. It is now

Even if it were true that the position of Rome as capital of the Empire did help to emphasize the importance of the Roman Church, are we not right in seeing in this a means prepared by Providence to insure a center for the growing religion? Believers are united in seeing the finger of God in the marvelous history of the Roman Empire, and in the services rendered to the Christian propaganda by Rome's peace-fostering institutions. Why are we forbidden to see a providential design in the choice of Rome as the see of St. Peter and the residence of his successors?

3. Toward the year 97, the Church of Corinth was troubled by grave dissensions. The Roman Church, on learning this, thought it proper to interfere. It was not the Corinthians who had requested Rome to

abandoned by the entire learned world in Germany and elsewhere. Many of those who were deceived in the matter, like the illustrious Anglican Bishop Lightfoot, have returned to the traditional belief. Renan himself regretted the concessions which he at first made to the Tübingen claims. Is it not saddening to see bishops authorize in this way theories that have long been rejected, and abandon for them the traditions of all their predecessors, of all the Doctors of the Church? Is it passion that blinds them?

do this; Rome took the initiative, conscious that its position imposed this duty. In the name of the Roman Church, Clement, its bishop, wrote to the Church of Corinth a long letter exhorting the faithful to return to harmony and submission to the ecclesiastical superiors. This letter was carried to Corinth by three messengers, Claudius Ephebus, Valerius Bito, and Fortunatus. Toward the end of the Epistle there is found a passage very well adapted to give an idea of the tone of authority which prevails throughout the document: "You will give us great joy if, obedient to that which we have written to you in the Holy Ghost, you will bring to an end this unjust violence of your anger, according as we have exhorted you to do, recommending peace and concord to you by this letter. We have sent faithful and prudent men who, from their youth to their old age, have lived blameless amongst us; they will be witnesses between you and us. If we act thus, it is because our sole concern has been and still is your prompt return to peace." [1]

[1] Clem. *Ep. ad Cor.* c. 58.

Whether we consider this spontaneous act of the Roman Church in itself, or weigh the words of the letter, we cannot escape the impression that, at the end of the first century of our era, fifty years after its foundation, this Church felt itself already in possession of superior exceptional authority, which it will not cease to claim later. At the time when Clement wrote, the Apostle John was still living at Ephesus. There is no evidence of interference either from him or from his disciples, although it was easier to communicate with Corinth from Ephesus than from Rome.

Now, what welcome did the Corinthians give to the exhortations and the envoys of the Roman Church? So perfect a welcome that Clement's Epistle was placed by them almost on a par with the Sacred Scriptures. Seventy years later it was still read on Sundays in the gatherings of the faithful.[1] Rome had commanded—and they had obeyed.

4. About twenty years after these events, St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was brought

[1] Dionysius of Corinth, in Eusebius, *H. E.*, IV, 23.

to Rome, to be there exposed to the beasts in the amphitheater. From the coast of Asia he wrote to the Roman Church. We must examine in what tone he speaks of the Roman community. During his sojourn in Asia he had already had occasion to write to the illustrious churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, and others; the titles of his letters always contain a number of epithets in honor of the communities addressed. In the case of the Roman Church these epithets are more numerous, and especially more significant, than in the case of the others. There is question of its preëminence. "It presides in the country of the Romans; it presides at the 'agape' (or 'over charity')." [1]

If the martyr had addressed his words to the bishop of Rome these marks of precedence could be interpreted as local, since it is always the bishop that presides in his church. But here it is not a question of the bishop, it is a question of the church. Over what does the Roman Church preside? Over certain other churches within definite limits? But Ignatius knows nothing of a limita-

[1] προκαθημένη τῆς ἀγάπης.

tion of this kind. Besides, did there exist in Italy at this time Christian communities distinct in their organization from the Roman Church? The most natural sense of this language is that the Roman Church presides over the united churches. As the bishop presides in his church over the works of charity, so does the Roman Church preside over these same works in the whole Christian world.[1] Let us bear in mind that Ignatius speaks with knowledge of the case; he knows the past of the Roman Church; he even alludes to situations and acts of which no record remains: "You have never deceived anybody;[2] you have instructed others. As for myself, I wish that everything which you command in your instruction, remain incontestable." What instruction and what commands are in question here? We can scarcely think that the letter to the Corinthians is

[1] This is recognized by A. Harnack in an interesting article read February 6, 1896, before the Academy of Berlin, which came to my knowledge after the first publication of this chapter.

[2] Ignat. *Ep. ad Rom.* c. 3. ἐβασκάνατε: the sense of this word here is slightly obscure, but it almost corresponds to the translation given.

meant; the circumstances of the Corinthian case are of too particular a nature; it is not even very certain that this incident came within the field of the Saint's knowledge; we do not find him in relation with Corinth. Is it a question of the "Shepherd of Hermas"? But it is very doubtful whether this book was published by this time. The simplest solution is to admit other acts, other documents, which still lived in the memory of the Saint's contemporaries, but have since been lost. At all events, the way in which he speaks of the authority of the Roman Church in the matter of teaching and of the commands which it addressed to the other churches, is altogether remarkable.

5. I have just mentioned Hermas and the "Shepherd." According to the express words of this book, the visions which it contains have been received, not for the good of Hermas alone, or for the Romans alone, but for all the churches; they are to be communicated to all the communities. In fact, the book of Hermas enjoyed a universal reputation and consideration in the ancient Church. It fell into discredit later, but not before the

third century. In the hundred years following its appearance it was so esteemed that in certain places it was put on a level with the canonical books. A like honor was paid to the Epistle of St. Clement.

6. Moreover, if we except the books which, rightly or wrongly, bore at their head the names of the Apostles, the Letter [1] of Clement and the "Shepherd" of Hermas are the only works which, in certain churches of the East, thus won a place either in the canon or in the appendices to it. This extraordinary honor shown to two Roman authors is very worthy of remark. Later, a similar consideration was attached to a book, genuine or spurious, of a third Roman, St. Hippolytus. One of the canonical compilations of the Coptic Church contains a collection of the "Canons of Hippolytus of Rome."

7. As regards Clement, we can point to other traces of the singular respect with

[1] I should have said the letters, for the homily ordinarily called the "Second Epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians," was treated with the same respect as the first, as soon as the name of Clement was attached to it.

which his memory was regarded in the East. I say in the East, for the West came to recognize his greatness only at a later time and this through translations from the Greek, dating from the beginning of the fifth century. It is in Syria, before the time of Origen, *i. e.*, toward the end of the second century, that the famous romance of the "Journeys of St. Peter" from Jerusalem to Antioch, was composed. In this romance Clement plays one of the main parts; he is the companion of St. Peter, his disciple par excellence, his witness and his helper in his struggles against Simon the Magician; moreover, it is Clement who is supposed to be the writer of the book. Among the pieces joined to the principal composition, a letter of Clement's, addressed to James, Bishop of Jerusalem, describes at length how, before St. Peter's martyrdom, the Apostles had presented Clement to the faithful of Rome as chosen to rule the Church after his death.

Another Syrian work, belonging in substance to the third century, but retouched in the following century, the "Apostolic Constitutions," has preserved for us a picture of

the discipline and the liturgy of these ancient times, under the form of "Commands given by the Apostles." The Apostles are supposed to hold a great council in which each of them formulates his commands upon various points of ecclesiastical discipline. The Apostles are not alone; Clement is with them; he serves as their secretary; to him they entrust the charge of promulgating their decrees.

The same rôle of secretary and interpreter of the Apostles is assigned to Clement in a writing similar to the former and still older, the "Ecclesiastical Canons," which is placed at the head of one of the books of Egyptian ecclesiastical law. It is the same case with the celebrated collection called "Canons of the Apostles," which was admitted into the code of the Byzantine Church at the Council of Trullo (692). It is always the same idea: Clement, successor to St. Peter in the See of Rome, is the most authoritative witness of the Apostolic tradition; the Apostles have charged him with the task of giving it literary expression and of communicating it to the churches.

Nor must I be reproached with having made use of apocryphal documents. I understand perfectly that the historical value of these documents is either slight or none at all. But they exist; they were composed in the third and fourth centuries, not in the Latin ecclesiastical world, but in the East; the compilers of these writings would not have pictured Clement as the disciple, secretary, and successor of the Apostles if they had not had a very high notion of the authority attaching to his name and his position in the Church. This is the idea which I state and emphasize. Strictly speaking, it could be maintained that the prominence assigned to Clement might have been suggested by a passage of the "Shepherd," where Clement seems to be represented as intrusted with the correspondence between the Roman Church and the other churches. But it is a far cry from this to the extraordinary part which devolves upon him in the "Clementines" and the various "Apostolic Constitutions." The explanation is plainly insufficient.

8. The East, therefore, readily placed its

disciplinary rules under the patronage of the ancient Roman Church. Important indications, more serious in character than the writings of which I have just spoken, allow us to attribute to the Roman Church the redaction of the oldest Creed.[1] From the middle of the second century at least the Roman Church had a formula of faith which the convert had to recite at Baptism; which he promised to profess during his whole life, and which served as a standard of doctrine (*regula fidei*). The writings of Irenæus and Tertullian suppose this formula, commonly called the "Apostles Creed," to be not only in existence but in possession of all its authority. It is only later that it makes its

[1] The same thing might be said of the formation of the *New Testament*. Upon this point, however, I shall refrain from entering into details. That would carry me too far. At any rate, the proof, for which various data have been gathered by A. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. i, p. 363, will scarcely have its full force unless we take into account the fact of the exceptional influence of the Roman Church in the second century. As it is precisely this fact which I wish to establish here, I think I ought to avoid everything that may have the semblance of a "*petitio principii*." But personally I think, with Harnack, that the *New Testament* was formed at Rome after agreement with the churches of Asia.

appearance in the East, for the first time, in the works of Origen—that is to say, in the following generation. Additions were there made to the Creed in various ways, as was the case also in the West; but everywhere it remained essentially the same. It is clear that so definite a formula could not have been composed in the same terms in different places. It has one birth-place and Rome is the place indicated by the chronology of the testimonies.[1]

9. From Rome, also, comes the most anciently attested of our episcopal lists. Here, earlier than elsewhere, care was taken, it seems, to give this significant expression to the idea of the Apostolic succession. Although the episcopal lists of Antioch and Alexandria are very venerable, yet they are attested only by the use which Eusebius makes of them in the beginning of the fourth century; that of Rome is in St. Irenæus and existed long before the end of the second century.

10. St. Irenæus was entirely correct in

[1] Cf. the discussion of these in the valuable work of Caspari "*Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols*," vol. iii.

saying that the Church of Rome was "known by all." It is indeed marvelous to see visitors from the most distant countries flocking thither during the entire second century. Some are sincere Christians, who intend to remain in the traditional faith, and who make the journey to Rome to strengthen this faith. St. Justin comes there from Greek Palestine, Hegesippus from Syrian Palestine, Tatian from Assyria, Abercius Marcellus from Phrygia. Asia especially furnishes a noteworthy contingent of travelers, some of whom come and return, while others remain. St. Polycarp, more than eighty years old, does not hesitate to journey thither from Smyrna for the purpose of settling the Paschal controversy long pending between the Roman Church and the Asiatics. After him, we may cite Rhodon, and Irenæus himself, the future bishop of Lyons. In the following generation Origen undertakes the journey to Rome simply from a desire to "see this very ancient Church." In Africa Tertullian shows himself constantly preoccupied with the Roman Church, whether he invokes its authority against the

Gnostic heresies, or, as a Montanist and rigorist, pursues it with his diatribes. With the Christian community of Carthage, already so important, he does not seem to trouble himself much; for him, the center of Catholic authority and direction is at Rome, and not in Africa.

11. The heretics are not less numerous. They, too, are attracted by the importance of the Roman community, where they hope to gain disciples. Certain ones among them go farther; they conceive the design of taking a hand in the direction of the Church itself; this is proved in the case of Marcion, perhaps also of Valentinus. Marcion came from Pontus, Valentinus from Egypt; from here also, under the episcopate of Anicetus, we remark the arrival of the famous female heretic, Marcellina, teacher of the Carpocratian sect. Prior to Marcion, the Syrian Cerdo spent some time in Rome. Every one of these heretics, it is true, succeeded in misleading a number of weak minds, but they met an insurmountable obstacle in the vigilant heads of the Church, whom they tried in vain to deceive by false protestations and

pretended conversions. It is clear that they continued to maintain themselves at Rome and used the influence of this great Christian center to further the success of their own enterprises. In the time of St. Irenæus a Gnostic teacher, Florinus, succeeded by dissimulation in winning a seat in the college of presbyters.

At the end of the second century we remark the arrival of other celebrated heretics. The doctrine which will later be condemned in the person of Paul of Samosata, and of Photinus, first attains prominence at Rome in the teaching of Theodotus of Byzantium.[1] Toward the same period Praxeas and Epigonus, coming from Asia, open at Rome a school of Modalistic theology, the theology with which the name of Sabellius remains connected. The Montanists, also, make their appearance there; a little later, there are found the Elkasaites of Syria, represented by a certain Alcibiades. It seems that the East could produce no heresy without at once finding it necessary to present it in the

[1] This Theodotus is the oldest Byzantine Christian of whom we have knowledge.

theater of Rome. Now, the appearance of a heresy at Rome meant its prompt and striking condemnation. It was at Rome that Valentinus, Cerdo, and Marcion were expelled from the Church as soon as they had made themselves known; it was the same with Theodotus of Byzantium, with Sabellius, and with many others.

The Montanists of Phrygia long tried to shield themselves under the authority of the Roman Church. In their own country they had, from the start, encountered quite lively opposition; for they were leading many astray by their prophecies and austerities. From Lyons, the martyrs of 177 intervened in their favor with Pope Eleutherius. Ten years later, St. Irenæus treats them severely in his treatise "On Heresies." In the Roman "milieu," ever tenacious of tradition, the authorities hesitated to take part against prophecy and the Paraclete. The matter dragged on until the beginning of the third century. A final attempt of the Montanist agents, says Tertullian, seemed at first to win the approbation of Pope Zephyrinus. To settle the case, documents emanating

from his predecessors, *auctoritates praecessorum ejus* [1] were alleged. But Zephyrinus reconsidered the matter in time; instead of countenancing the Montanist movement, he condemned it.

From the history of this affair, the details of which remain obscure, one fact stands forth clearly, namely, that the Phrygian disturbance met its counterblow at Rome; that its leaders, although repudiated by many bishops in their own country, did not therefore think themselves compromised and resourceless; that the documents written in the name of the bishop of Rome (*auctoritates*) at first claimed a certain tolerance for them; that later, when the nature of the new prophecy became better known, a very plain condemnation was passed upon it by the same authority which had, until then, kept a more reserved attitude.

Moreover, if the condemnation was long expected, we should remark that, from the origin of the movement, from the episcopate of Eleutherius, the Roman Church had been informed of the case. In the beginning,

[1] Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, I.

Montanism was only a local affair, of interest simply to the churches of Phrygia and Asia. If the martyrs of Lyons in 177 are disquieted about it, it is because several of their important members are Asiatics or Phrygians. Even at the time that Tertullian wrote against Praxeas, the question, for the Pope at least, still had merely an Asiatic character. The matter was transacted in Asia and Phrygia by letters sent from far Rome.[1] In thus proceeding the popes intervened in a contest which did not directly concern their own Church. It is a repetition of the affair at Corinth in 97.

12. This is not the only case of interference on the part of Rome. How instructive is the Paschal question at the time of Pope Victor (about 189–198)! Two practices are in conflict: that of Rome, followed almost everywhere, fixes the Christian festival of Easter on the Sunday after the Jewish Passover; that of the province of Asia accepts the Jewish Passover as the day of the Christian feast. The Asiatics claim the greatest authorities, the Apostles John and Philip,

[1] Tertullian, *loc. cit.*

their disciples Papias and Polycarp, prophets and famous martyrs. Their churches are celebrated throughout all Christendom, their tradition is universally respected. Nevertheless, Rome does not yield. It also has its tradition, plainly manifested by its conflicts with the Asiatic usage since the time of Trajan and Hadrian. To settle this matter the venerable Polycarp journeys to Rome, but in vain. He does not convince Pope Anicetus. Under Soter, the successor of Anicetus, relations become even less friendly. Victor determines to end the controversy, and, first of all, submits it to the consideration of the other churches. At his request the bishops gather in all the countries of the Empire, and even beyond it. They collect information upon the question and send to Rome the result of their deliberations. All these councils, except that of Asia, favor the Roman usage. This fact itself is significant; we see how difficult it was, even for churches like St. John's, to offer opposition to the Roman tradition. At the end of the second century the Paschal usage of Rome was accepted almost everywhere.

But the most important fact in the first phase of the question is the convocation of councils. Polycrates of Ephesus, who writes in the name of this council,[1] and who maintains his own opinion with the greatest vigor, expressly acknowledges that, if he has called together his colleagues, it is at a request from Rome. Do we notice anything like this in the case of any other church? Where is the bishop of Antioch, of Ephesus, of Alexandria, who has even the idea of assembling in this way the entire episcopacy from Gaul to Pontus, to Osrhoene, and to Palestine?

The mere fact of Pope Victor's taking the initiative, an initiative which was effective, would suffice to show how evident was the exceptional position, the œcumenical authority, of the Roman Church in these ancient times.

But let us continue the story. The Asiatics resist; they declare that they will not abandon their tradition. Victor then proceeds against them by way of excommunication; he put them outside the communion, τῆς κοινῆς ἑνώσεως, according to the expres-

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.*, V, 24.

sion of Eusebius. Victor, then, is conscious that he, the head of the Roman Church, disposes of the universal communion, that it is in his power not only to break off relations with a group of churches, but to put this group under the ban of the whole Church. What language should we use if we cannot designate by the name of head of the Church the depositary of authority like this? St. Irenæus and some other bishops, it is true, thought Pope Victor's severity excessive and so expressed themselves to him. This has given rise to an argument against the authority of the Roman See, as if, even in our days, the Pope has not always been ready to listen to the observations of his brethren in the episcopacy. It is possible, indeed, that Victor overstepped the just limit. I say this with reserve, for our information upon this matter is, at best, very incomplete; we lack, in particular, the documents that emanated from the Pope. Whatever be the case, in whatever way Victor received the criticisms of certain bishops, one point, at least, is indisputable, viz.: that the Asiatics abandoned their usage, and this not in consequence of

the Council of Nice, as is often still repeated, but very long before. The Paschal quarrel, which was settled at Nice, concerned the churches of Antioch and Alexandria. From the beginning of the fourth century, the supporters of the old usage of Asia are represented in their own country by a small schismatic sect, and not by the legitimate bishops. The latter are in perfect agreement with Rome and Alexandria upon the date of Easter.[1] In whatever degree the vigorous measures of Pope Victor had been maintained or applied, they were followed by the submission of the Asiatics.

13. A contest, similar to the Paschal controversy but slightly different in its issue, occurred in 256 between Pope Stephen and the Church of Africa. The head of the African Church, St. Cyprian, cannot be accused of hostility to the Roman Church. He was in constant relation with the latter; in his letters and other works, he always testifies to the greatest respect for the chair of Peter, for the "sovereign Church (*princi-*

[1] I have treated this question at length in the *Revue des Questions Historiques*, July, 1880.

palis), from which proceeds the unity of the episcopacy."

As regards Pope Stephen personally, it is clear from different indications that Cyprian did not esteem him so highly as his predecessors. They had disagreed upon other matters, they were in entire opposition upon the question of Baptism administered by heretics, a Baptism recognized at Rome as valid, and at Carthage considered invalid. These differences in usage could be justified by theological argument; for the moment, the question was viewed as one of discipline and not of faith.[1]

[1] It was almost always the same when there was question of deciding what heretics were to be *rebaptized*, and what others simply to be *reconfirmed*. The Greek and Russian Churches, for example, have greatly varied in their way of treating Latin converts to "orthodoxy." After the Latins had been driven from Constantinople in 1260, and after the rupture of the Union of Florence in 1484, the Greeks limited themselves to reconfirming. In 1629, the Russian Church which had till then followed this practice, imposed the repetition of baptism. But in 1655 and 1667, the patriarchs of Constantinople, Nicon and Joasaph, together with the other Greek patriarchs of the East restored the ancient practice. In 1718, even the baptism administered by the Lutherans and Calvinists was accepted in Russia, as well as in the Greek patriarchates. A change took place in 1756; the four patriarchs declared Western baptism

Supported by the entire body of the African bishops, who met in council under his presidency, and by a letter of Firmilian, Bishop of Cesarea, in Cappadocia, one of the most illustrious prelates of the East, Cyprian resolved to continue his practice. Nevertheless, Stephen threatened to break the bonds of communion. Did he put his threat into execution? We do not know. At all events, the Africans did not see in this disagreement a reason to break with the Roman Church. They refrained from "denouncing the peace of the Church." Moreover, neither they nor Firmilian questioned the authority of the Apostolic See; they confined themselves to thinking and to saying that Rome was following a specifically wrong practice.

Stephen's successors, beginning with the famous martyr Xystus II, did not enforce

invalid upon the pretext that it was not performed by immersion. Finally, since about 1860, the Synod of Athens, and, after it, the patriarchate of Constantinople, again decided to have only confirmation repeated. It is plain that in thus modifying their baptismal practice, the Orientals have not intended to vary in their faith.

I have taken this information from W. Birbeck, "Russia and the English Church," vol. i, p. 63.

the rigorous measures formerly announced or promulgated. If the rupture really occurred it did not last longer than a few months. Stephen died on the second of August, 257; his successor, Xystus, lived on good terms with Cyprian, who is called by his biographer "a good and peace-loving bishop." Shortly afterwards, toward 260, Roman envoys brought alms and words of consolation to the Christian community at Cæsarea, impoverished by a barbarian invasion. The letters of St. Dionysius of Alexandria [1] unite with these facts to prove that the disagreement did not continue after Pope Stephen's time. Nevertheless, neither the Africans nor the Orientals sacrificed their usage; it is only from the fourth century that it was little by little conformed to that of Rome, and that the divergence was relegated to the dissident sects of the Donatists and the Arians.

14. These quarrels refer to a rite; others concern doctrines and the doctrinal domain, in particular, what is now termed Christology.

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.*, VII, 5.

We have already remarked that the Roman Church from the time of Popes Victor, Zephyrinus, Callistus (189–222), intervened to condemn the heresy of Theodotus of Byzantium which was causing scandal at Rome. In addition to this school, another, that of the Modalists or Patripassians, for some time escaped the censures of ecclesiastical authority. It was quite easy by some artifice of language to give to the heresy an appearance of orthodoxy. In the fourth century it was still gaining converts; it was quite late in his life and with great difficulty that the illustrious Athanasius decided to recognize that Marcellus of Ancyra was a dangerous ally. At Rome, Pope Callistus, after different attempts to recall Sabellius, the head of the school, to the right path, determined to excommunicate him. The author of the "Philosophumena," who does his best to compromise Callistus in favor of Sabellius, is obliged, however, to acknowledge that it is Callistus who pronounced the condemnation. This was, he says, to avoid being defamed before the other churches. We have here, perhaps, only the tattle of controversy, the

interpretation of intentions, of which history has no power to judge. This trick of the controversialist is a new indication of the great celebrity of the Roman Church, of the extreme attention with which its proceedings were watched.

15. The Roman Church was not concerned merely with matters at home. Origen, as we know, had grave difficulties with Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria, but their quarrels were on points of discipline. Although the bold and strange doctrines of Origen aroused great opposition after his death, and although some persons drew attention to them during his lifetime, there is no evidence that any ecclesiastical authority in the East demanded an explanation from him on the score of doctrine. But toward the end of his career, he finds himself obliged to justify his beliefs before Pope Fabian and to withdraw certain statements.[1]

16. Origen was only a very well known and influential theologian. Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, his pupil and former co-

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.*, VI, 36. St. Jerome, *Ep.* 84. Rufinus *In Hieronymum*, I, 44.

laborer, was more than this; he was the head of a church, and a very important church. Is it necessary to recall here how, inspired with too many of the master's doctrines, carried away by the warmth of his controversy against the Sabellians, Dionysius came to express upon the Divine Word ideas of such marked "subordinationism," that the Arians could boast that they had had him for their .ancestor? As the charge of heresy against his doctrines and writings had been forwarded to Rome by the faithful of his church, Pope Dionysius wrote a weighty and eloquent letter, a long fragment of which has been preserved for us by St. Athanasius. It is one of the most precious documents of Christian theology before the Council of Nice. In words of great moderation the Bishop of Alexandria is reminded of the orthodox tradition upon the divine Trinity; he is even commanded not to fail to employ the term "consubstantial," already introduced into use, at least in Rome, although it was not to become classical until the following century. Besides this lengthy admonition, in which, as I believe, his name was not mentioned,

Dionysius of Alexandria received from Rome an invitation to reply to the accusation of heresy. He gave his explanation, corrected his language, modified his doctrine in accordance with tradition, and in this way merited the reward of being defended by St. Athanasius against the claims of the Arians.[1]

This authoritative intervention on the part of the Roman Church in the doctrinal affairs of the Alexandrian community in no wise changed the excellent relations existing between the two great cities. Before and after this incident, in the period of the persecution of Decius and Valerian, in the midst of the long siege of Bruchion, during the crisis caused by the schism of Novatian and by the baptismal controversy, we do not cease to find Dionysius communicating by letters with the different popes who then occupied the See of St. Peter, and even with members of Rome's clergy.[2] The Alexandrian Church is as intimately connected as

[1] St. Athanasius, *De Decretis Nicænæ synodi*, c. 26; *De Sententia Dionysii*.

[2] Out of the forty-seven letters or treatises which we know were written by him, about eighteen bear some Roman address.

the Carthaginian with the Roman ecclesiastical world. Dionysius is truly a second Cyprian; yet he shows himself more conciliatory than the African, more ready to hearken to the exhortations addressed to him.

17. Let us now hasten to a subject more consoling than all these contests about doctrines, prophecies, ritual, discipline. The superior authority of the tradition of the Roman Church was not the only reason why it was known and respected. To the majority of the faithful Rome's preëminence was most apparent in its charity.

Rome might resound with the din of ecclesiastical conflict raging in every land, but above all this din was heard the echo of the suffering endured by the other Christian communities. The Roman Church felt itself afflicted by the most distant sorrows, whether caused by ordinary adversities, or by the plague of war, or by persecution. Envoys went forth in Rome's name to console the afflicted and to bring them generous alms. This was on Rome's part an enduring tradition. In the time of the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, in his

letter to Pope Soter, testifies to it: "Since the beginning it is a usage established among you to heap benefits upon all the brethren, to send aid to the numerous churches in all countries. Thus do you solace the wretchedness of those who are in need; thus do you spread your alms amongst our brethren condemned to the mines, thus observing the tradition which you Romans have received from the Romans your ancestors." [1]

After the persecutions of Decius and of Gallus, Dionysius of Alexandria [2] reminds Pope Stephen of the letter which the Roman Church had just written, and the help which it had sent on every occasion to the Church of "all the Syrias [3] and of Arabia."

Two years after the Goths and the Borans invade Pontus, penetrate to Cappadocia, and sack the great city of Cæsarea. Firmilian is still its bishop. Rome does not ask in what tone, a few years before, he referred to Pope Stephen. The ecclesiastical treasury at Rome, exhausted by the generous sacrifice of

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.*, IV, 9.
[2] Ibid., VII, 5.
[3] Coelesyria, Phœnician Syria, Palestinian Syria.

the archdeacon Laurence, has had scant time to be refilled. It matters not: Cæsarea suffers, money will be found for Cæsarea: "We know," writes St. Basil to Pope Damasus, "we know from the remembrance which our fathers have kept of the fact, and also from the letters which are still preserved here, that Dionysius, that blessed bishop, illustrious for the rectitude of his faith as well as his other virtues, came formerly to the aid of our Church of Cæsarea; that he consoled it by his letters and sent it envoys charged with redeeming our brethren from captivity." [1]

This tradition of charity will last as long as the persecutions. Eusebius attests that there were abundant manifestations of it in the last one, that of Diocletian and Maximinus (304–312). Only a few facts have been preserved: but from the way in which they have been reported to us, it is clear that they represent a number of others. This is œcumenical charity, this is the verification of the words of Ignatius: "The Roman Church, that which presides over charity."

[1] Ep. 70.

III

Thus, the churches of the entire world, from Arabia, Osrhoene, Cappadocia, to the extremities of the West, experienced in everything, in faith, in discipline, in government, in ritual, in works of charity, the incessant activity of the Roman Church. It was everywhere known, as St. Irenæus says, everywhere present, everywhere respected, everywhere followed in its advice. Against it there rises no opposition, no rivalry. No community entertains the notion of putting itself on the same footing as Rome. Later, patriarchates and other local primacies will come into being. In the course of the third century, one barely sees their first outlines, more or less vague, in process of formation. Above these organisms just forming, as well as above the collection of the isolated churches, there looms up the Roman Church in its sovereign majesty, the Roman Church represented by its bishops, the long series of whom is connected with the two coryphæi of the Apostolic chorus; the Church which knows itself and declares itself and is consid-

ered by the whole world [1] to be the organ and center of unity. Its position is so plain that it strikes the eyes of the pagans themselves, whenever they fix their attention upon the organization of the Christians. The Emperors are more likely to come into relation with the Christians than the rest of the pagans; indeed, communication with the Christians is even a necessity of government for the rulers. In 272 the Emperor Aurelius finds himself suddenly called to settle a great quarrel that divides the Christians of Antioch. The bishop of this city, Paul of Samosata, because of his doctrine and his conduct, is to be deprived of his office. Sentence has been passed upon him in a great council held by the neighboring bishop, and has been communicated to the heads of the Roman and Alexandrian churches. But Paul

[1] Even distant Edessa felt Rome's influence and tried to become united with it. Pope Victor had the Council of Osrhoene summoned towards 195. According to Edessenian tradition Palout, the first bishop after the two founders Addai and Aggai, was ordained by Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, who in turn had been consecrated by Zephyrinus, Bishop of Rome, successor of St. Peter. ("Doctrina Addai," at end; cf. Cureton, "Ancient Syriac Documents," pp. 44 and 63.)

laughs at his condemnation; he continues to occupy the episcopal house, from which the new bishop attempts to drive him. The suit is submitted to the Emperor. This is a very novel case to come before a pagan prince. For which of the two bishops, each of whom claims to be right, will he decide? "He decided the question," Eusebius tells us, "in the most sensible way, by ordering them to restore the episcopal house to those who, on matters of doctrine, received letters from the bishops of Italy, and from the city of Rome." [1] A century later Theodosius did not act otherwise when he declared that he considered as legitimate bishops only those who were in communion with Damasus of Rome and Peter of Alexandria.

Here, with the third quarter of the third century, I conclude this study of the facts. After this date, Christian history for some time becomes obscure. Except the facts of

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.*, VII, 31. The Emperor looked upon it as evident that no disagreement was to be expected between the bishops of Italy and the bishops of Rome; otherwise, he would have been more precise in his decision.

the great persecution, it tells us very few things until the Donatist sedition in the West, and the Eastern quarrels with regard to Arius. The facts and testimonies which I have gathered and classified come for the most part from a single book, the "Ecclesiastical History" of Eusebius, which, in spite of the good will of its author, is very far from satisfying the demands of our curiosity. Other facts have been borrowed from contemporary writings, like those of St. Clement, St. Irenæus, Tertullian, and St. Cyprian. All these works, with the single exception of St. Cyprian's, were very little known at Rome in the fourth century. Eusebius was read there only at a later date in the wretched version of Rufinus; Clement and Irenæus, even in their Latin version very soon became literary rarities: the same can be said of Tertullian. Cyprian, as we have seen, expresses himself in terms of great respect for Rome, but he at the same time furnishes the example of a decidedly clear manifestation of autonomy. It is not then, from Christian literature that the Romans at the end of the fourth and the beginning of

the following century, derived the authority of their Church. Damasus and his successors, Zosimus, Boniface, Celestinus, whose language shows so imposing a confidence in the prerogatives of their See, had not the information that permits us to invoke here Christian antiquity. Besides a very vague and almost effaced literary tradition, they had scarcely any other arguments than the tomb of St. Peter, their own episcopal succession, and the Gospel. More fortunate than they, we can prove by historical documents that in reality they were right; that the grandiloquence of certain letters of theirs is not an empty pretence, but the expression, sometimes a little exaggerated, of the most ancient ecclesiastical tradition.